

THERE is little doubt the new sponsorship scheme introduced into amateur soccer by Rothmans at the start of the season has proved a resounding success. The sponsors could hardly have wished for a more exciting finish to their first season, climaxed on Saturday by Wycombe Wanderers' 3-0 title triumph over Leytonstone.

With Bishop's Stortford drawing 1-1 with Walton and Hersham on Wednesday, it meant that the Division One championship was decided by just two points, Hendon taking the runners-up spot.

For clinching the title, the Blues will receive £1,000 while Hendon's share will be £500 and Stortford's £300. Wanderers were presented with the championship trophy and flag on Wednesday night during the representative match between the Rothmans Isthmian League and the Hellenic League. In past years, their only reward for winning the title was a certificate to signify their success.

Throughout the season, Wycombe have chalked up 11 victories by three clear goals which will bring them in a further £440 — £40 being awarded for each win. Finally, they will be receiving a share of the sportsmanship pool — the most successful aspect of the whole scheme.

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Disciplinary action has been greatly reduced this term with clubs losing one point for a booking and four for a dismissal. When a club loses eight points they no longer qualify for a share of the pool, which is worth £2,000.

Remarkably, only six players from the 22 Division One clubs were given their marching orders this season — two from Clapton and one from Hayes, Walton and Hersham, Walthamstow Avenue and Bromley. Bookings were obviously more

common but 14 of the clubs will be receiving a pro-rata share of the pool.

Worst offenders were Clapton who finished with a total of 20 penalty points, 12 of their players having their names taken. Walthamstow amassed 16, Dulwich 12 and Barking and Enfield ten each.

Wycombe themselves had only one player booked all season in the league — and that for shirt pulling by Dave Bullock. Their prize is expected to be around £200 while Hitchin

Town, the only club to keep a clean sheet throughout the term, will get the premier share.

There is a good chance, too, that Wanderers will be in line for more cash at the start of next season, for Rothmans are hoping to stage a play off between the four leagues they are sponsoring. The tournament will decide the 'Champion of Champions'.

Rothmans will be applying similar sponsorship rules to both the Western and the Northern Leagues next season as well as the Isthmian and Hellenic. And

they are aiming to stage a tournament between the champions of each league.

Welton Rovers are the Western League champions while Spennymoor won the Northern League title and Moreton Town the Hellenic. Ironically every league was decided by only one or two points. Welton beat Taunton by

1 single point while Spennymoor won 2-1 in a play off with Blyth while Spartans, who knocked out Wycombe from this season's Amateur Cup.

Moreton pipped Clanfield for the Hellenic League title by one point. Rothmans will be paying all four club's expenses for the games — which could be considerable as a good deal of travelling is bound to be involved. They are also offering cash incentives to the competing clubs.

Rothmans spokesman Tony Williams was well pleased with the first season of sponsorship. "Wycombe's lone caution this season proves that attacking and disciplined football can be successful," he said.

Wanderers manager Brian Lee felt that sponsorship had brought a new dimension of interest into the game for clubs, players and supporters. He added "I was not keen on the three points for a victory at the start but had we played on the old system of two points for a win, Hendon would have beaten us on goal average this year!"

Brian also thought sponsorship had brought the amateur game more publicity this year than it had in the previous ten years. "A good deal of respect has arisen from the professional football world, too," he added.

If anyone was to benefit from the sponsorship scheme at the start of the season, it was Wycombe. The accent was one of attacking, clean football and Wanderers' own style of play was built around those factors.

Their goals for tally of 96 this term testifies their devotion to entertaining football, as it did two years ago when they won the league in 1972, scoring over 100 goals in the process.

On Wednesday, league secretary Mr. Ingram Whittingham paid tribute to their triumph in the club programme. He wrote: 'This is an excellent opportunity to heartily congratulate Wycombe Wanderers on finishing champions, the third time they have won the league in the last four years — a remarkable achievement. Much of the credit must go to their manager Brian Lee.

They have set a magnificent example throughout the season not only by their stylish, attractive and attacking football but also by the exemplary conduct of their players at all times, one player only having been cautioned and that for a purely technical offence.'

Congratulations also came from Tuesday's first meeting of the High Wycombe charter trustees — the body which is carrying on the traditions of the former borough. The trustees recorded their official congratulations to the club and authorised a sub-committee to go ahead with arranging a civic celebration in their honour.



Rothmans Isthmian League secretary Ingram Whittingham presents the Isthmian League Cup to Larry Pritchard, the Wycombe Wanderers captain, during Wednesday's match at Loakes Park.